

# Spiraling toward a New Cold War in the North? The Effect of Mutual and Multifaceted Securitization

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## Abstract

Building on a discourse-theoretical reading of securitization theory, this article theorizes and examines how two political entities can become locked in a negative spiral of identification that may lead to a violent confrontation. Through mutual and multifaceted securitization, each party increasingly construes the other as a threat to itself. When this representation spreads beyond the military domain to other dimensions (trade, culture, diplomacy), the other party is projected as “different” and “dangerous” at every encounter: positive mutual recognition is gradually blocked out. Military means then become the logical, legitimate way of relating: contact and collaboration in other issue-areas are precluded. Drawing on official statements 2014–2018, this article investigates how Norwegian–Russian relations shifted from being a collaborative partnership to one of enmity in the High North. The emerging and mutual pattern of representing the other as a threat across issue-areas since 2014 has become an “autonomous” driver of conflict—regardless of whether either party might originally have had offensive designs on the other.

**Keywords:** securitization, discourse, Russia, Norway, interaction, escalation

## Introduction

Underlying Russia’s rejection of “the West” and the deteriorating relations between these two political entities in recent years, there lie multiple drivers. Russian domestic politics and the changing approach of the Kremlin are at the heart of many explanations (Grigas 2016; McFaul 2018; Taylor 2018). Other accounts emphasize how deteriorating Russia–West relations are somehow the result of a mutual process (Legvold 2014; Mearsheimer 2014; Charap and Colton 2017; Conradi 2017; Monaghan 2019). This article can be placed in the latter school; it shows how what some call the “new Cold War” has developed out of interaction *between* Russia and the West, bringing these political entities into a relation where the threat of war appears imminent. It does so by investigat-

ing the dyad of Russia–West relations, which was particularly benign and where military hostilities seemed highly unlikely for twenty-five years following the end of the Cold War.

Focusing on the changing relations between Norway and Russia, I show how rising tension spread from the 2014 crises in Ukraine to the North.<sup>1</sup> Initially, both parties declared that they neither wanted nor believed that the new strategic tension between Russia and the West would spread to or define relations in this region. This was not surprising. Norway and Russia had managed to

<sup>1</sup> This article builds on and expands the empirical analysis in Wilhelmsen and Gjerde (2018). I wish to express my gratitude to Kristian Gjerde for helping me with retrieving the additional bodies of text for this article.

build a close and practical partnership in the North following the end of the Cold War. Relations in the region had been characterized as pervaded by a spirit of cooperation and a “culture of compromise” (Hønneland and Jensen 2015). However, by October 2018, NATO was conducting “Trident Juncture,” the largest military exercise since the Cold War on Norwegian territory, with twenty-nine NATO countries participating, as well as Finland and Sweden, involving 50,000 troops in all.<sup>2</sup> While this exercise was underway, Russia unexpectedly announced that it would conduct missile tests in the Norwegian Sea simultaneously.<sup>3</sup> Few could deny that the new Russia–West tensions had spread to the North. Although the Norwegian authorities were reluctant to identify Russia as a “threat” for an entire year after the annexation of Crimea, today they openly speak of and prepare for hostilities. Russia, for its part, recently claimed that Norway has become “the frontier of deterrence of Russia” in the policy plans of the United States and NATO.<sup>4</sup>

This development will be explained with reference to changing Russian and Norwegian representations of each other: toward construing the other part more as a threat than a partner in one issue-area, the rippling outward of this representation to other issue-areas, the policy changes effectuated in line with these shifting representations, and how these changes have been (re-)acted upon by the other side. Within such a process of *mutual* and *multifaceted* securitization, attention to domestic audiences, quests for internal unity, and coherent identity articulation in volatile times send signals of offense and non-recognition across the border to the foreign state audience—playing into a mutual blame game, shaping interaction, and further escalating tensions to the point where the threat of hostilities seems imminent. As long acknowledged by security-dilemma theorists, both the classical realist and newer constructivist proponents, *interaction* has a dynamics of its own (Herz 1950; Jervis 1978; Mitzen 2006; Booth and Wheeler 2008). I argue that the emerging and mutual pattern of representing the other as a threat, not only in the military sphere, but

also across issue-areas, has become an “autonomous” driver of conflict—regardless of whether either side (Norway/NATO/West, and Russia) might originally have had offensive designs on the other.<sup>5</sup>

By invoking the new Cold War in this article, I do not intend to measure the level of threat and distribution of power between the parties or suggest that these are the same as in the old Cold War. This article does not speak to the recent discussion on the similarities and differences between the old and the new Cold Wars (Legvold 2016; Lieven 2018). Rather, I put the spotlight on the mutual and evolving social identification processes between political entities that can help to push a relation to the point where an outbreak of hostilities seems imminent. Just as during the Cold War, the parties today hold increasingly and mutually incompatible descriptions of self and other (Ringmar 2002) and focus on blaming each other (Legvold 2016). I believe the totalizing “blame game” now underway and the mutual and intensifying descriptions of the other, metastasizing to a level where the other stands out as an “existential threat” at every encounter, are central to understanding the unlikely return of high military tension in the North.

Drawing on a detailed study of Russian and Norwegian official texts in the years following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and applying a discourse-theoretical approach to securitization theory, this article offers two theoretical contributions to second-generation securitization theory post-Copenhagen School (Balzacq 2005; Stritzel 2007; McDonald 2008; Salter 2008; Floyd 2010; Haggmann 2015; Wilhelmssen 2017; Stengel 2019, building on Wæver 1994 and 1996; Buzan et al. 1998). First, I propose that securitization processes should be understood and studied in dyads because the shift to more radical representations of the other—i.e., a higher degree of securitization—often unfolds in a *mutual* pattern of identification and interaction between political entities. Second, an issue-specific securitization—say, representing the other part as an existential threat in the military domain—may spread to other dimensions of the relationship, making the other part appear as different and dangerous at every encounter. Such *multifaceted* securitization can intensify a negative spiral, ultimately blocking the chances for positive mutual representation and recognition. Military means then become

<sup>2</sup> The exercise included 10,000 vehicles, 150 aircraft, and 65 ships, as well as a US aircraft carrier and its strike group. This was the first time an aircraft carrier had entered the Norwegian Sea since the Cold War.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-plans-missile-firing-exercise-off-norway-amid-nato-drills/29570878.html>. Accessed October 23, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, referred in <https://tass.com/politics/1148905>. Accessed June 3, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Although this author does not claim to know the “real” intentions of the actors, the situation resembles the one which the classical security dilemma literature seeks to explain: “two status-quo powers arming against each other in the incorrect belief that the other is hostile” (Jervis 1978, 187).

a logical and legitimate way of relating to the other: contact and collaboration in other issue-areas are precluded. With this approach, I seek to expand on and integrate a discourse-theoretical version of securitization theory into the study of how and why relations escalate to the brink of war.

Although the post-positivist foundation of this study complicates direct communication and compatibility with much of the classical literature on the security dilemma and spirals, it does speak to the central question of *how* collective actors, such as states, become unsure of whether the other has defensive or offensive intentions and why they come to see and act toward each other as aggressive, regardless of the “true intentions” of the other (see e.g., [Jervis 2001](#); [Mitzen and Schweller 2011](#)). The positivist literature on the security dilemma and spirals usually theorizes such pathways to conflict as an encounter between actors reasoning through preference structures in rational games, or a set of games ([Jervis 1978](#); [Fearon 1995](#); [Mearsheimer 2001](#); [Glaser 2010](#); [Copeland 2011](#); [Mitzen and Schweller 2011](#)). In contrast, my approach, building on the fundamental insight that political entities are socially constituted and that the identity of self and other is subject to change through linguistic practices, theorizes such pathways to conflict as emerging through many encounters and gradually changing relations where identity dynamics serve as the causal engine.

This article proceeds as follows: I first lay out the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the argument, building on second-generation securitization theory and the concept of ontological security. Then, after a short presentation of the historical background of Russia–Norway relations in the North, I turn to changing Russian and Norwegian mutual representations in 2014–2018, and the shapes taken by the securitizing narratives on both sides. Investigating the Norwegian side in depth, I show how the image of Russia as a threat has solidified over time, spilling over into non-security issue-areas, and made a string of initiatives that reject Russia’s logical and legitimate policies in a new Norwegian approach. I examine how Norwegian official securitization of Russia has been driven by the quest for unity and continuity in representations of the self in a time of uncertainty and disruption. The fifth section concerns this driver and the unintended consequences of skewed attention to internal cohesion and domestic audiences at the expense of Russia. I point out how Russia has interpreted and (re-)acted to Norway’s securitizing moves and policies, showing how mutual and multifaceted securitization unfolds in practice—and results in escalation.

## Studying Escalation through Mutual and Multifaceted Securitization

While some hold that the growing rhetoric of confrontation between Russia and the West can be employed without running the risk of war ([Lieven 2018](#)), I take this use of words seriously. Political language serves to make some courses of action legitimate and logical, while precluding others ([Hansen 2006](#), 21; [Jackson 2006](#); [Wilhelmsen 2017](#)). According to this fundamental discourse-theoretical insight, securitization—defined as a process where the other is increasingly cast as different and dangerous to the self—will manifest itself in concrete policy practices ([Hagmann 2015](#), 9; [Hayes 2009](#), 985; [Wilhelmsen 2017](#), 28–29). Thus, there is a link between the rhetoric of confrontation that produces the subjectivities of threatened self and threatening other, and the policy responses initiated in the course of such a securitization.<sup>6</sup> The more different and dangerous to the self the other is construed as being, perhaps even to the level of “existential threat,” the more reasonable and logical will the use of force against this other appear ([Bandura 1990](#), 7–8; [Wilhelmsen 2017](#), 24–26).

Securitization, viewed through a discourse-theoretical lens, emerges through a plethora of utterings and is, therefore, best theorized as a gradual process, not one specific happening ([Ciuta 2009](#); [Hagmann 2015](#), 21–22; [Wilhelmsen 2017](#), 21–24). That is not to say that securitizations cannot end up in a radical black/white juxtaposition, where *They* represent an existential threat to *US* and can be related to only through the barrel of a gun. Indeed, the aim of this article is precisely to show how the gradual and increasing securitization of Russia in Norway, and of Norway in Russia, is bringing relations to a point where the threat of hostilities seems imminent. But there is no necessary evolution to this point of possible destruction: it is a contingent process ([Guzzini 2011](#)). When securitization is produced through a myriad of statements that together make the other stand out as a threat, there is always a possibility for more and more statements that construe the other as “defensive” or even “potential partner” to feed into the process, bringing the threat image a few levels down and making possible a policy of restraint or even collaboration. Here, however, I seek to identify

<sup>6</sup> In the discourse-theoretical reading of securitization, the “emergency measures” or policies undertaken to counter the threat are the material expressions of securitizing narratives. Discourses are not only systems of linguistic signs: they encompass the social world and are “concrete” in that they produce a material reality in the practices that they invoke ([Wilhelmsen 2017](#), 28).

mechanisms that push securitization upward to the point where the buildup of force seems necessary and hostilities imminent.

My first suggestion is to conceptualize and study securitization processes in dyads, that is, as a *mutual* process. The shift to more radical representations of the other (a higher degree of securitization) often occurs in a reciprocal pattern of identification and interaction *between* political entities (Wilhelmsen 2020, 30). How political entities such as states identify, talk to (or about) each other, and the policies they launch in accordance with and following such speech, play into and shape the speech and policy courses of other states. There are essential *effects* of securitization processes where the other party is cast as different and dangerous to the self (Wæver 1995; Buzan et al. 1998; Stritzel 2007; McDonald 2008; Hagmann 2015; Wilhelmsen 2016). Within a dyad of political entities that increasingly identify the other as a threat to the self, a self-perpetuating logic sets in, with the two securitizations fueling each other.

Under what conditions and how does this happen? As noted by Mitzen (2006) and others, states do seek not only physical security, they also seek security of the self (ontological security), mainly because agency requires a stable cognitive environment.<sup>7</sup> Particularly at a time of crisis states strive to create continuous narratives of self (Steely 2008a; Zarakol 2010; Subotic 2016). Routinized security talk and the projection of the other as a threat delivers ontological security. It creates inner cohesion in the referent group and the ability to act (Wilhelmsen 2017, 27–32). This is because representations of self and other are bound together, dependent on each other. Collective identities and the social groups they refer to are constituted in relation to difference and maintained through the continued juxtaposition and drawing up of boundaries between self and other (Barth 1969; Connolly 1991). However, securitizing the other for enteric use also creates a “securitization dilemma”—“a difficult choice where a securitizing move represents a powerful and attractive opportunity for political mobilization, but with the danger of perverse and unintended consequences” (Van Rythoven (2019, 2). The unintended consequences of securitization have been suggested to be of several kinds: contextual, social, and temporal (Van Rythoven 2019, 10). Within the social type of contingency, which concerns how an audience can interpret a security claim

in unexpected ways, much attention has been given to situations in which a securitizing move can be rejected by the audiences it is meant to mobilize (Wæver 1989, 1; Collins 2014; Van Rythoven 2019). Of particular relevance for relations between political entities, but less investigated, is the unintended consequences that a securitization within one political entity of *another political entity* may have on that other political entity.

To maintain ontological security, actors must not only be able to assure themselves of who they are (endogenously)—and protecting a continuous narrative of self becomes particularly pressing in a time of crisis—but they also need to be identified and recognized by others, and on their own preferred terms (exogenously) (Steely 2008b, 51–52; Zarakol 2010, 3; Ringmar 2014). A securitizing actor’s firm (but probably unconscious) attention to ontological security and the domestic audience at a time of crisis can communicate non-recognition to the other (foreign) audience. If both parties in a dyad of political entities push securitization of the other upward for enteric use but disregard how the other will interpret it, as well as the non-recognition of the other party that such securitization implies, a negative spiral sets in.

For example, a securitization of NATO as different and dangerous to Russia creates both inner cohesion in the Russian polity and makes possible a policy of “military modernization” and a posture of “defensive deterrence,” but it can have unintended consequences. It can be taken as a rejection of NATO’s self-constituted identity as a legitimate, reliable, security-seeking actor and elicit a string of representations of Russia as different and dangerous on the NATO side.<sup>8</sup> Failure to be recognized by the other on one’s own preferred terms might not necessarily result in feelings of inferiority and shame, triggering efforts to reconstruct one’s own identity, as Bially Mattern has suggested (2004, 12–13) or “progressive change” of self to become like the other, as Ringmar (2014) holds. As Lupovici (2012, 818) notes a collective actor that experiences ontological threat can “redefine the situation in order to protect identity.” “Avoidance,” he says, building on Giddens (1991, 188) “allows an actor facing an ontological dissonance to revalidate its identity rather than to change it or to change its behaviour.” Lupovici explores the strategy of avoidance in situations

<sup>7</sup> Ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time—as being rather than constantly changing—in order to realize a sense of agency (Mitzen 2006, 342 building on Laing 1969; Giddens 1991, 41–42).

<sup>8</sup> The underlying understanding is that “intentions” are not an intrinsic property of the state (here: Russia), but depend on the social recognition of the other states and their interpretation of Russia in this specific historical setting. As noted by Mitzen (2006, 357) “states do not have a final say in whether they are security-seekers.”

where dissonance is created endogenously, between conflicting self-identifications and the responses undertaken to offset threats to these self-identifications within one political entity.

Avoidance may play out differently when the ontological dissonance emerges *exogenously* in a dyad of political entities. To reduce the dissonance between the understanding of self and the explicit identification of one's own political entity by the other as being something different and dangerous, revalidation of own identity can be achieved through *externalization*, by simply returning the negative identification. This strategy is manifest as a clear pattern in the texts by Norwegian/Western and Russian leaders studied below. It is hardly surprising that a collective actor would respond to the non-recognition implicit in being securitized with externalization in the form of talking and hitting back instead of undertaking some form of internal revision. Responding by *mirroring* the securitization of your group by the other party can be rewarding in terms of delineating and maintaining self-identity, particularly in a time of crisis. To restate and return to the case in focus: the non-recognition implicit in Russia's securitization of NATO can elicit highly antagonistic representations of Russia from the NATO side, triggering another round of representations and accusations from the Russian side, and so on.

Such a negative spiral of mutual representations and accusations can be driven further when the different non-military *issue-areas* in which collective political entities engage also become subject to securitization. While relations between such entities usually take place on different international arenas addressing different issue-areas and exhibit a mixed pattern of friendly and hostile interaction (Jervis 2001, 37; Bially Mattern 2004), they may become subject to patterned all-encompassing friendly or hostile interaction. The latter, I propose, can happen when security concerns take center-stage in relations, through a spillover from mutual securitization in the military sphere into other arenas of potentially neutral or friendly interaction, such as trade, culture, or even diplomacy.

In more scholarly terms, a negative spiral in relations is intensified when the other is securitized, i.e., construed, through speech, as different and dangerous *at every encounter*, and when every policy move in any issue-area is represented as a tool in the hands of this threatening other. Such *multifaceted securitization* pushes the representation of the other upward on the scale of difference and danger and can create a situation where positive recognition is not granted in any sphere. In this situation, the collective actor experiences an exogenous rejection of its self-ascribed identity in every policy sphere

where it seeks outside confirmation—making the experience acute. In turn, this experience of acute ontological dissonance may be met by a strategy of avoidance and externalization: a counter-securitization that mirrors and matches the near-total rejection to which the political entity itself has been subjected. In the course of the ensuing spat, with hostile representations flung back and forth on every arena of encounter, the other is finally left with no face but that of an enemy. That resolves the dilemma of knowing what the intentions of the other are, as each party is now quite certain that the other has offensive designs.

From this understanding, logically flow policies of positioning and armament in the military sphere, and disengagement and non-communication in non-military issue-areas. In contrast to endogenously generated avoidance noted by Lupovici (2012, 813), the problem is not that a collective actor undertakes contradictory measures to alleviate ontological dissonance, but rather that the same measures of disengagement and confrontation seem logical and legitimate in every sphere of interaction between two political entities. In this situation, the parties have few possibilities of extricating themselves from the spiral that leads to confrontation. If the other is securitized and denied recognition across issue-areas and arenas, that leaves no space for responding with friendship to overcome mistrust—which would be the opening through which to start pushing the spiral downward.

A high level of mutual and multifaceted securitization can produce, in Jervis' terminology (2001, 41), a "deep security dilemma" ... "a situation where mistrust cannot be overcome" and where there are "no missed opportunities for radically improving relations." But in contrast to Jervis' conception, the road toward this high level of mutual securitization, with the ensuing minimal trust, is gradual and contingent, and produced through a plethora of representations. Moreover, in this approach, the key "mover" in the security dilemma—the perception of each party that the other has offensive intentions—emerges from their discursive practices, their representations of each other. Mutual and multifaceted securitization answers Mitzen and Schweller's (2011) call to understand how certainty about the other actor's aggressive intentions can contribute to the onset of war.<sup>9</sup> But this certainty, with the tragic outcome it can result in, should not be seen as conditioned by structural uncertainty at the

<sup>9</sup> Mitzen and Schweller (2011, 5) indicate that "structural uncertainty, not alone, but coupled with individuals' misplaced certainty, causes conflict." Misplaced certainty is "thought of as a particularly stubborn misperception that leads to suboptimal choice."

outset; nor is the misplaced certainty in the next phase built from “inside” an individual decision-maker with reference to cognitive and affective causes (Mitzen and Schweller’s (2011; Jervis 1976, 387–406). I submit that it is built through the multiple and spreading self/other representations that bring the “offensive intent” of the other into being as a social reality, making it reasonable and logical to undertake policy steps to counter this aggressive intent.

This alternative approach also has some advantages in terms of validation. Empirical validation of a theory is difficult if misplaced certainty is explained by intentions. Jervis, for example, although admitting that it is difficult to pin down whether the Cold War *was* a security dilemma (2001, 38) still tries to settle this question by revisiting archive material and establishing the nature of the US and Soviet leaders’ intentions at that time (2001, 53). My reading of the security(zation) dilemma acknowledges that the intentions of collective actors are inaccessible, and works from the tangible empirical fact of words actually issued.<sup>10</sup> When such words are understood as having constitutive power, conditioning the paths of action collective actors can take, it is easier to ascertain whether two parties have moved into a situation where the use of force seems logical and legitimate.

For Norway and Russia in the North, the tragedy might be that, although they both need a coherent ontological landscape, think of themselves as “security-seekers” and as achieving more security through their multifaceted securitization of the other, they might be creating a relation devoid of any positive engagement, thereby endangering their own physical security.

## Data and Method

This study builds on in-depth, systematic scrutiny of official statements from the years 2014 to 2018. The Norwegian data are statements, press releases, speeches, etc., from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Prime Minister’s Office, and the Ministry of Defense (MoD). The Russian data are transcripts and statements from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and transcripts from the public appearances of the President. The texts have been “scraped”—downloaded in full—from [www.regjeringen.no](http://www.regjeringen.no), [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru), and [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru). Using the open source “corpora-ex-

plorer” software (Gjerde 2019), we then extracted a clearly defined subset of this large document collection: The final text collection contains documents that include references to both Russia and the Arctic on the Norwegian side, and documents that include references to Norway *or* the Arctic on the Russian side—the difference being due to the far higher number of documents on the Norwegian side. In certain parts of the analysis, the official texts retrieved through web-scraping have been supplemented by media articles referring to comments from Russian and Norwegian officials. The aim has been to sample more statements at particularly critical events in order to study action–reaction patterns.

The texts have been studied by using discourse analysis in the tradition of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), with emphasis on the contested nature of meaning-making. This has implied systematically mapping the *changing* pattern of self and other representations in official texts. The method has been designed to foreground the constitutive power of language and capture securitization as a *process* by studying a plethora of official utterances over time (Wilhelmsen 2014, 58–64; Stengel 2019). I focus not only on how certain verbs, adverbs, and adjectives attached to nouns might help to constitute the other as increasingly different and dangerous to the self (Milliken 1999, 232–33), but also on how linguistic repetitions, mergers, and comparisons might contribute to such a process. The article also lists concrete policy practices that have been implemented in line with Norway’s changing representations of Russia in the section “A new Norwegian approach to Russia.” These have been retrieved from Norwegian media and from Norwegian MOD and MFA websites. While the combination of systematically reading and manually coding such large bodies of text is exceptionally time-consuming, the mixture arguably strengthens the reliability of interpretivist endeavors such as this (Hopf and Allan 2016, 20).

More generally, the approach used here recovers the identity categories *from* texts and other sources of shared meaning (Hopf and Allan 2016, 27). That Norway and Russia are securitizing each other is thus not a claim made a priori, but a conclusion I draw after consulting a plethora of texts. In the fifth section, on internal cohesion and external offense, the challenge has been to stay within the confines of relying on *explicit utterances* to capture the interactive dynamics at play when two social entities engage in mutual and multifaceted securitization. This has entailed trying to reach conclusions on strategies of externalization and mirroring by consulting texts where one party explicitly refers to something the other party said or did.

<sup>10</sup> Notably, from Jervis’ account (2001, 58–55), the only thing we can call a fact is that both parties during the Cold War consistently described each other as (irreparably) hostile.

The answer to the crucial question of how we “know” that the relation between the parties is moving into a spiral will emerge from the content of the texts. If most or all representations on both sides and across issue-areas attach a high level of danger and difference to the other, we know the relation in spiraling toward confrontation. Conversely, if we find neutral or even positive identifications of the other in certain issue-areas or during certain events, we know the relation is not fully in the trap and there are possibilities for cooperative interaction.

### Norway–Russia Relations before 2014

Russia and Norway have approached each other in various ways across different issue-areas and changing over time. Although security concerns were central, this was so even during the Cold War.<sup>11</sup> The lengthy negotiations over the delimitation line in the Barents Sea starting in the early 1970s exhibited the mixed approach, as they barred the securitization of this issue in the public debate and located it outside the orbit of East–West confrontation. From Norway’s side, representations of the USSR were always mixed. It figured not only as a threat but also as a neighbor, something that gave birth to the *policies of balance* between deterrence and reassurance of the USSR. Norway’s “self-imposed restraints,” which included a clear non-nuclear position and practice as well as no basing of foreign troops on Norwegian territory, were aimed at alleviating Soviet concerns of Western aggression (Riste 2001, 214–17).

Following the end of the Cold War, the new Russia was de-securitized in Norwegian official discourse. Norway now sought to strengthen the multilateral institutional structures in the North and to promote interaction with Russia in these. A major Norwegian effort was the initiation of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 1993. Although the Arctic region experienced neglect from Moscow in the 1990s, this changed after the turn of the millennium. Given the general focus on Russian reform through integration with Western economies and global institutions in the first Putin years, Russia’s approach to Norway in the North became more inclined toward cooperation—evident, for example, in Russian policies on Svalbard (Jørgensen 2010). This corresponded with a renewed Norwegian emphasis on partnership and commitment to institutional collaboration with Russia from 2005. The landmark 2010 Norwegian/Russian agreement on the delimitation line in the Barents Sea,

dividing the contested area evenly in two, was a fruit of a culture of compromise which logically grows out of mutually compatible representations of self and other (Jensen 2015). Arguably, such a culture could thrive because the two parties did not view, represent, and relate to each other primarily as a security threat, but rather as compatible entities with some shared interests.

In the years leading up to the crises in Ukraine, Russia featured in official Norwegian discourse as a key partner and as an actor who respected the law.<sup>12</sup> Even in policy areas where Russia was represented as a “challenge,” collaboration was to be the solution.<sup>13</sup> When heightened Russian military activity in the North was mentioned, it was represented as a “legitimate” return to “normal.”<sup>14</sup> Also on the Russian side, Norway appeared mainly as a reliable international actor and as a good neighbor, with Statoil as a promising corporate partner for Russian companies.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the 2010 maritime delimitation agreement between Russia and Norway was hailed as a key achievement,<sup>16</sup> held to be “just and in accordance with international law,” and “advantageous to both states.”<sup>17</sup> The region as a whole was portrayed by Russia as an area of opportunity, an example for other, less peaceful, regions.<sup>18</sup> The broad and mutual de-securitization of the other, also across issue-areas, even seeping into the military sphere, was amply illustrated when Norwegian officials suggested during a visit by Russian Deputy Minister of Defense Anatolii Antonov that “we will become world champions in defending the High North, on both sides of the border.”<sup>19</sup>

However, this discourse was pursued together with a low-key but continuous Norwegian discourse on the need to strengthen the territorial defense, as well as to draw the attention of NATO to the North—both springing from the representation, in parts of the Norwegian political establishment, of Russia as a lingering “residual” Soviet threat (Heier and Kjølberg 2015, 35). On the Russian side, already in 2012 Moscow construed “our partners’ ... call for NATO to come there” as a dangerous act that could lead to “the militarization of the

<sup>11</sup> For the most comprehensive and recent account of Norwegian–Russian relations in the twentieth century, see Holtsmark (ed.) 2015.

<sup>12</sup> N2; N4; N5; N6; N9; N10; N12; N14; N18; N22; N23; N25 (here and in the following: see the online appendix for references to Russian (R) and Norwegian (N) primary sources).

<sup>13</sup> N6; N8; N9; N22; N15. (N10; N24; N17).

<sup>14</sup> N1; N3; N7; N12; N14.

<sup>15</sup> R14.

<sup>16</sup> R1.

<sup>17</sup> R3.

<sup>18</sup> R4.

<sup>19</sup> N10.

Arctic.”<sup>20</sup> During fall 2012/spring 2013, new apprehensions appeared on the Norwegian side concerning NGOs in Russia and Moscow’s turn to “authoritarian” rule. This marked a shift in Norwegian representations of Russia: Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre had earlier stated explicitly that Russia’s weak human rights and democracy credentials could not be used to question the legitimacy of Russia as an actor on the international arena.<sup>21</sup> With a new government in power from September 2013 and *before* the crises in Ukraine, official Norwegian discourse on Russia shifted further: Russia became less of a partner and more a human rights violator. Modernization of the Russian military was no longer associated with “normalization” as in 2012, but with the country’s rising great-power ambitions.<sup>22</sup> However, at this time Moscow seemed to disregard Norway’s emerging securitization of Russia as a threat to Western values. In January 2014, Foreign Minister Lavrov stated that the dialogue at the level of the states’ leadership between Russia and Norway was deepening and dismissed insinuations from the press that rising Western–Russian tensions had negative impacts on Russian–Norwegian relations.<sup>23</sup> This lack of initial reaction testifies to the staying power of ingrained representations of the other, and the importance of recognizing how mutual securitization and the acute ontological dissonance it can create emerge over time through many encounters in many issue-areas.

### Russian Securitization of Norway Post-Crimea: How it Sticks and Spreads

Norway as Part of a Multifaceted Western Threat  
Russia’s securitization of its neighbor in the North was gradual and official statements still offered several distinct identifications of Norway in the years 2014 to 2016. But the representations of Norway as a “good neighbor” were increasingly complemented by representations of Norway as a country that was becoming a less good neighbor—catering to its Western partners—thereby acting against the own interests of both Russia and Norway.<sup>24</sup> Texts from 2017 and 2018 show Norwegian policy-moves in the military as well as in other policy spheres framed as part of a broad Western front against Russia. Thus, Norway’s decision in October 2016 to invite 330 US Marines to be based on a rotational basis at Værnes near Trondheim, and the doubling of such

troops on Norwegian territory further north, closer to the Russian border, in 2018, are repeatedly framed as part of a broad US offensive.<sup>25</sup> Often, Norway is represented merely as a part of the US military system, a launchpad for potential US “aggression.”<sup>26</sup> By late 2018, Norway is routinely placed as one of many European sites for NATO/US bases that are “surrounding Russia.”<sup>27</sup> But Norway is also increasingly construed as a hostile agent in its own right. Previous accusations that Norway was *intentionally* destroying good neighborly relations by giving in to US demands were reiterated. Norway was pursuing a “politicized approach,” “undermining confidence and predictability in bilateral relations” and acting as if Russia were a threat in the North.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the strictly military sphere, Norwegian criticism of Russia, such as claims that Russia was responsible for hacking against central actors in Norwegian society, was dismissed and construed by Russia as part of a general “anti-Russian” trend initiated in Washington and spreading across the globe.<sup>29</sup> Russia’s comments on the arrest of M.A. Bochkaryov in Oslo on charges of espionage indicated that Norway was operating with “blackmail,” “fabricated charges,” “false accusations,” and “provocations.”<sup>30</sup> Norwegian human rights critique such as the Norwegian Helsinki Committee campaign during the World Championship in football was dismissed as “fake,” as merely “Russophobic” “propaganda work”—a tool in a political fight against Russia waged by the West.<sup>31</sup> These representations construed Norway as an integrated part of the West, a deceitful and dangerous partner, and show how the Russian securitization of Norway is linked to and cannot be grasped without examining Russia’s changing representations of the West, the United States in particular, in this period.

The merger of Norwegian identity into the broader one-sidedly *positive* Western identity in Norwegian official discourse (discussed below) finds its parallel on the Russian side but with negative connotations: “Norway,” together with “NATO,” “the EU” and the “USA,” was subsumed under a Western entity that had “deceived the post-war promises to Russia,” “expanded their zone,” “forged their own security at the expense of Russia,” “pursued a zero-sum game” and “destroyed the dream of a common European house.” The 2014 “coup” in Ukraine and the implementation of sanctions against

20 R2.  
21 N17; N18; N19; N22.  
22 N24; N25.  
23 R6; R7.  
24 R10.

25 R16; R18; R60; R63.  
26 R32.  
27 R73.  
28 R12; R15; R17, R60; R63; R64.  
29 R20.  
30 R66; R70; R71.  
31 R29; R59.

Russia following the annexation of Crimea are presented as the beginning of a new wave in this offensive.<sup>32</sup>

The United States is securitized in particular; as an “aggressive” and “offensive” power which is pursuing global dominance (a unipolar world) and deliberately hitting or “provoking” Russia—by constantly expanding the “anti-Russian” and “illegal” sanctions regime; by increasing the number of military exercises and building up military infrastructure close to Russia’s borders in Europe; by dismantling the nuclear arms reduction architecture through withdrawal from the INF Treaty; by building up a missile defense system (also in the Arctic) to neutralize Russian nuclear capabilities; by using cyber weapons against Russia.<sup>33</sup> An emerging theme in Russian official discourse is the claim that the United States in its campaign against Russia is breaching international law and common moral and ethical principles and thus undermining the values and the international order that the United States once sought to build.<sup>34</sup> This accusation of double standards is also leveled against European countries.<sup>35</sup> With the troubles in US–Russian relations expanding during the years 2016–2018, Russian officialdom construes the West’s strategy against Russia, throughout history and “as soon as Russia rises from its knees” and “becomes stronger,” as one aimed at “restricting” and “detering Russia.” Even without pretexts such as Crimea, the West would “invent” events to harm Russia.<sup>36</sup>

A picture emerges of a West under the leadership of the United States that is using every possibility in *any issue-area* in relations with Russia as tools in a “strategy of confrontation” to “isolate” Russia; in the military-strategic issue-area, in diplomacy (by expelling Russian diplomats in 2016 and 2017), in public diplomacy (by adding Russia to the Axis of Evil, making “unfounded accusations” against Russia), in the economic issue-area (by widening of the “anti-Russian” sanctions regime), in the media (by expelling and denying accreditation to Russian journalists and prohibiting news outlets Sputnik and RT), in the legal issue-area (by adopting the Magnitsky legislation), and in sports (Russian authorities hold that accusations of doping among Russian athletes have become part of a politicized campaign). Even people-to-people collaboration is obstructed by the West’s anti-Russian campaign according to Russian official speech. Through this strategy, the Western countries are “dictating their

will to the rest of the world through their position of strength.”<sup>37</sup> As in Russian representations of Norway, the Western campaign against Russia is not construed solely as a state-run affair. Russian discourse merges different actors on the Western side into one threatening social entity: the media, human rights activists, NGOs, and political authorities are all represented as joined in waging a strategy of confrontation against Russia.<sup>38</sup>

Taken together, the securitization of Norway becomes starker and starker over time, as Norway is subsumed under a US-led “West” that is constantly expanding a deliberate strategy of confrontation, using all actors and operating simultaneously in all issue-areas to bring Russia down. This is an example of *multifaceted securitization*: the representation of the other as different and dangerous spreads across issue-areas, increasingly blocking out positive representation and recognition of the other on one arena of encounter after the other.

As for the explicit blame game, Russia’s explanation of deteriorating relations in the North was that Norway was acting in concert with its Western partners. Accordingly, Russia’s decision to make a list of Norwegians who were not allowed to travel to Russia was simply a response to Norway joining the “anti-Russian” sanctions regime—which in the Russian narrative was not a legitimate response to the annexation of Crimea.<sup>39</sup> The West, and the United States in particular, allegedly started a new arms race, worked for the return of a new cold war, and was responsible for the deepening crises in world politics—Russia is just reacting adequately.<sup>40</sup> Any unfriendly act by Russia is construed as simply a mirror, an analog response to what Norway/the West first does to Russia—and Russia is “forced to retaliate.”<sup>41</sup>

### The Russian Self and Relations in the North

The escalating and routine representation of the “West” as threatening described above comes with the opportunity of rearticulating Russian identity. The Russian state as such is construed as returning to its status as a legitimate, proud great power with a culture, language, and traditions of its own. “Russia” in the North after the watershed events in Ukraine is portrayed as a normal, law-abiding social entity, even as a patient victim—juxtaposed to the offensive, assertive, and global Norway/NATO/United States described above.<sup>42</sup> Its own

32 R31, also R55; R58; R67.

33 R5; R9; R11; R13; R24; R30; R31; R32; R34; R47; R67.

34 R39.

35 R68.

36 R32; R37; R41; R42; R43; R46; R52; R58; R65; R67; RB71.

37 R68, also R71.

38 R35; R37; R38; R41; R43; R46; R51; R55; R59; R67.

39 R19.

40 R18; R24; R30; R32; R39; R46; R47; R63; R65.

41 R37; R38; R42; R43; R47; R61; R71.

42 R5; R9; R11; R13; R30; R31; R32; R34.

markedly increased military attention toward the Arctic (including recurrent military exercises and the building of new military infrastructure and capabilities) is represented as purely defensive, just, and suitable for a large power such as Russia, now moving forward in an era of “competition.”<sup>43</sup> In sum, Russia is not only given as the security-seeker in this region but is also suggested to be the protector of the special cooperative Northern culture. Even after the crises in Ukraine erupted, Russia says that the spirit of cooperation in the Arctic and the primacy of international law should be maintained.<sup>44</sup> Russia also states that it is willing to cooperate with anyone, on equal terms, any time. The latter is an invitation that is directed at Europe in particular, but which can meet no response as long as Europe/Norway construes Russia’s approach as trying to split the West by “courting” Europe.<sup>45</sup>

In Russian government statements at meetings and at international conferences on the Arctic, the main framing of the region continues to be one of enormous resources and development potential. The hopes are high for the Northern Sea Route as a driver of economic growth: “Russia’s wealth will grow through the Arctic.”<sup>46</sup> Russia’s role as a responsible driving force for the development of this region, and for the best of all Russians, is portrayed as natural given its status as an “Arctic Great Power.”<sup>47</sup> Simultaneously, however, the earlier claim that a military approach from Western countries constitutes a threat to the current state of affairs—especially attempts to get NATO involved in the Arctic—is reiterated.<sup>48</sup> And by 2017, the need to “master” the Arctic and secure Russian sovereignty, borders, and interests in this region, also by boosting military presence, is emphasized. The Arctic has become fundamentally important for Russian security; a “full return to the Arctic” is necessary: the buildup of US military infrastructure in the region and even Norway’s struggle to get foreign military forces deployed on Norwegian territory are core references.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in Russia’s identification of self and of the High North, we see how security increasingly takes center-stage, suppressing other dimensions where the other/Norway could be represented and related to as less threatening.

<sup>43</sup> R24; R27; R28; R32; R33; R35; R36; R47.

<sup>44</sup> R23; R24; R32; R40; R46.

<sup>45</sup> R39; R44; R46; R52; R63.

<sup>46</sup> R45; R46; R54; R56; R58; R62.

<sup>47</sup> R23; R24; R32; R40; R46.

<sup>48</sup> R2, R8.

<sup>49</sup> R32; R47; R49; R50; R53; R63.

## Russian Internal Cohesion, Effects of External Offense

The increasing securitization of the United States/West in the years 2014–2018 and the rhetorical placing of Norway into this multifaceted threat delivered Russia ontological security. The Russian leadership could revalidate Russia as a defensive, just, responsible, and legitimate great power and guardian of the North and ensure the continuity of this understanding in the Russian audience, thus securing internal unity and the ability to act. However, this securitizing narrative had unintended consequences on the other side—particularly because the new representations of Norway/the West as different and dangerous to Russia were spreading far beyond the security domain, with concrete Russian policy changes in the North following logically in their wake (see the online appendix 1). These policy changes, together with the one-sided and harsh blame game described above, were construed in the West/Norway as confirming Russia as an “offensive” and “aggressive” actor—now also in the North. Simultaneously, Russian words and deeds rejected the West’s/Norway’s self-appointed identity as a defensive, law-abiding, and normative actor.

Russian securitization of Norway/the West is assumed to play into and contribute to explain the evolution and escalation of Norway’s securitization of Russia described below. Likewise, it is assumed that the evolution in Russian representations presented above is not just a reflection of internal Russian developments and the propaganda strategy of the Putin leadership, although the high consistency in formulations and tropes across multiple texts certainly indicates a very systematic Russian information strategy. The understanding advocated in this article, which I will illustrate in more detail in the final section is that the Norwegian securitization of Russia post-2014 plays into and shapes Russian representations and approaches in the North.

While the material reviewed here shows a Russian narrative that places no guilt for deteriorating relations on the Russian side, we do find alternative representations of Norway in the texts under study. The representations of Norway as a reasonable collaborating partner was continuous in Russian statements in specific Northern institutions, such as the Barents institutions, where Russia is included on an equal footing when Russian representatives can speak about common collaboration and victories (e.g., during World War II) and sometimes when addressing traditional bilateral issues.<sup>50</sup> This was even evident when a former Norwegian border official, Frode Berg, was arrested in Moscow in 2018 on charges

<sup>50</sup> R40; R44; R57; R68.

of espionage.<sup>51</sup> Russia also identifies “good” Norwegian NGOs and actors that have an “objective” picture of the situation—meaning that there is a type of Norway Russia can relate to and work with.<sup>52</sup>

This continuous dual representation of Norway and the reluctance to securitize Norway fully suggests two things. First, that Norway’s status as an existential threat to Russia is contingent upon the view of the wider Western social unit, the United States in particular. Second, that Norway’s approach to Russia could weigh in and affect Russia’s approach to Norway—by speaking, acting, and relating to Russia in the form of “the Norwegian partner” instead of “the Western threat” and confirming Russia’s self-ascribed identity in certain issue-areas instead of repeatedly representing Moscow as being “assertive” across the board. Herein might lie the opening for Norway to influence the Russian approach to Norway and possibly an opening for de-escalation in the North in the future. For now, however, we turn to the evolving Norwegian narrative on Russia—which offers few such openings.

**Norway’s Securitization of Russia Post-Crimea, How it Sticks and Spreads**

**Russia as a Multifaceted Threat**

The reframing of Russia in official Norwegian discourse in spring 2014 to a rule-breaker, most importantly a violator of international law, an actor that disregards established institutions and someone that cannot be trusted was immediate and heavy. Russia was repeatedly represented as an assertive power with “both the capacity and will to use military power for political gain,” incapable of respecting other states’ political goals.<sup>53</sup> Although it was stated in the beginning that Russia was not considered a “direct threat to Norway,” taken together, the various representations quickly resulted in a constitution of Russia as a threat.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, Russia could not shed this new status and become the collaborative partner it was construed as in the previous twenty-something years.<sup>55</sup> The crises in Ukraine, and in particular the annexation of Crimea, is constituted as a tectonic shift in international relations and heads nearly every general account of international affairs, even several years after the events in

Ukraine.<sup>56</sup> Reference to Russia’s use of force against another European country, aggressiveness, breach of international law, and poor democratic and human rights credentials were made again and again and communicated a sense that Russia was not only potentially a military threat but also, by undermining the international order and its entire underlying set of values, what one might term a civilizational threat. It had become Norway’s opposite and irrevocably so, it seemed.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, contrary to what one might expect, the securitization of Russia did not fade out as the core event which triggered it faded in time. Speaking in 2017, Minister of Defense Ine Marie Eriksen Søreide said that Russia had, with its actions in Ukraine, “created a situation of unpredictability and un-stability in Europe that had not been seen since the Cold War.”<sup>58</sup> Russia was consciously seeking to weaken European and Transatlantic “unity.”<sup>59</sup> By the end of 2017, Russia was no longer just a “great power,” but a “great power with nuclear weapons.”<sup>60</sup> The Norwegian intelligence’s public review in 2017 put “Russia” at the top of the list of concerns.<sup>61</sup>

The representations of Russia as a threat also acquired ever new dimensions over time; with reference to the alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 US elections, Norwegian authorities warned that Russia would launch comprehensive intelligence operations against Norway and seek to influence the Norwegian elections in 2017.<sup>62</sup> The notion that Russia was engaging in “information warfare,” “fake news,” “disinformation,” and “destabilizing operations” was gaining a foothold.<sup>63</sup> Indicative of this shift is the fact that the Norwegian Prime Minister dismissed Russian official statements on changes in Norwegian defense policies as mere “propaganda.”<sup>64</sup> We see a discursive process in which Russia’s actions in non-military issue-areas such as information or diplomatic communication also become *securitized*, construed as tools in the hand of a threatening Russia. This multifaceted securitization even takes hold in MFA texts.<sup>65</sup> As noted by MFA officials, geopolitics was increasingly

51 R48, R55.  
 52 R67.  
 53 N35; N43; N47; N48; N69; N90.  
 54 N98.  
 55 N27; N28; N29; N30; N31; N32; N33; N34; N35; N36; N38; N40; N41; N44; N45; N46; N48; N49; N50; N52.

56 N52; N58; N61; N87; N91; N97; N105; N112.  
 57 N70; N104; N105; N108; N112.  
 58 N61; N90.  
 59 N74.  
 60 N98.  
 61 <https://www.pst.no/alle-artikler/trusselvurderinger/trusselvurdering-2017/>. Accessed October 21, 2019.  
 62 N73; N76.  
 63 N96; N98.  
 64 [https://www.nrk.no/urix/erna-solberg\\_-propaganda-fra-russland-1.13384682](https://www.nrk.no/urix/erna-solberg_-propaganda-fra-russland-1.13384682). Accessed October 21, 2019.  
 65 N65. Also confirmed in author’s conversations with Norwegian MFA officials January 8, 2019.

shaping commercial policy (*næringslivspolitikken*).<sup>66</sup> In the annual Foreign Policy Statement to the Norwegian Parliament in 2017, security and transatlantic collaboration are given as the first of five pillars of Norwegian foreign policy. Strengthening “our friendship with the Nordic countries and with Germany, France and the UK,” with “security” as the main reference was listed as the second.<sup>67</sup> In 2018, safeguarding and securing Norway and Norwegian interests through a clear trans-Atlantic anchoring was the top priority in Norwegian foreign policy.<sup>68</sup>

As for the explicit blame game, both MoD and MFA texts put the blame for the deteriorating relations exclusively on the Russian side, expecting Russia to change its ways first, before any improvement could take place. *Unstable* and *unpredictable* are core words used about the new situation, these circumstances are tied to Russia’s behavior—Norway/Western actors are just responding.<sup>69</sup> Again, the bias of the blame game does not seem to abate over time. Russia (solely) was also to blame for the deterioration of the nuclear disarmament agenda, the US decision to abandon the INF treaty in 2018<sup>70</sup> and the evolution of the Syrian crises.<sup>71</sup>

### The Norwegian Self and Relations in the North

As in all securitization processes, a re-phrasing of the other from partner to threat implies a re-phrasing of self, as well as calls for unity and protection. In official texts, Norway was portrayed as a principled actor that must hold Russia accountable. Good-neighborly relations were now construed as the result of Norway being firm, predictable, principled, and adhering to international law.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, Norway is represented as a vulnerable political entity in need of protection, and calls are made to strengthen cooperation with NATO, the United States, and Europe. These three entities are represented as being trustworthy protectors and having “good values” (“freedom,” “peace,” and “democracy”) and being defenders of “international law.”<sup>73</sup> Over time “the West,” “NATO,” “the United States,” “Europe,”

“the EU,” “the Nordic countries,” and “Norway” as “friends,” “allies,” or “likeminded” get merged into one positive self—juxtaposed to a Russian other with hardly any positive distinctions in any sphere.<sup>74</sup> Of particular interest given the increasing tension in US–Russian relations at this time and Russia’s preoccupation with US dominance in the world are representations of Norway’s relations with the United States. In addition to fairly one-sided positive representations of the United States, Norwegian officials communicated that the United States would *always* be the guarantor of European security.<sup>75</sup>

As a mirror-image of Russian reframing of the North with reference to US/NATO military build-up, Norway reframed the region with reference to Russian actions in Ukraine. While still a space governed by “collaboration” and “international law” it figured increasingly as a military strategic space, with security a key priority for Norwegian foreign policy. By upping the civilian, economic, and military activity in the north and anchoring Norwegian security more firmly in NATO, Norway could contribute to “stability” and “predictability” in the North.<sup>76</sup> It is suggested that strengthening the *transatlantic vector* in Norwegian foreign policy and making Norway into “NATO in the North” is required to preserve the North as a “peaceful region” and secure good neighborly relations with Russia.<sup>77</sup> There is no doubt then that Norway construes itself and the enlarged Western political entity it is a part of as a security-seeker in the North.

Simultaneously, the discursive positioning of the North into the new orbit of potential conflict with reference to Russia *not* being a security-seeker grew stronger. In late 2016, the Minister of Defense stated, with clear reference to Russia, “we cannot preclude that military force will not be used against Norway... It is no longer so that war is declared through diplomatic messengers.”<sup>78</sup> In 2017, a “threat to the territory of Norway” was no longer unrealistic.<sup>79</sup> Also, relations between Russia and the “Western security community” were construed as a return to the type of “race” that was going on during the Cold War. That Russia is narrowing the technological gap is suggested to be a problem.<sup>80</sup> In 2018, the official reasoning as pronounced by the Norwegian Minister of Defense was that the new “security situation in the North as in all of Europe,” which was of “concern on both sides

<sup>66</sup> N94.

<sup>67</sup> N63; N70; N71.

<sup>68</sup> N105.

<sup>69</sup> N70; N83; N85; N99; N105.

<sup>70</sup> N53; <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/wE2K91/Soreide-mener-Russland-har-skyld-i-at-nedrustningsavtalen-ryker>. Accessed October 21, 2019.

<sup>71</sup> N113.

<sup>72</sup> N37; N39; N42.

<sup>73</sup> N76; N99; N101; N105; N107; N112.

<sup>74</sup> N61; N62; N70; N76; N91; N90; N97; N98.

<sup>75</sup> N52; N53; N72; N89; N103; N105; N109; N112.

<sup>76</sup> N52; N63; N116.

<sup>77</sup> N66; N81; N98; N105; N109; N119.

<sup>78</sup> N51.

<sup>79</sup> N52; N109.

<sup>80</sup> N98.

of the Atlantic” had been brought about by Russian “assertiveness.”<sup>81</sup>

**A New Norwegian Approach to Russia**

With such new understandings of “Russia” and relations in the North, the former approaches of “strategic partnership” and “constructive engagement” were rendered impossible. They were replaced by “firmness” and “deterrence”—and “collective defense” and “reassurance” *not* of Russia, but of the new NATO countries such as the Baltic states and Poland.<sup>82</sup> And in line with the multifaceted securitization of Russia outlined above, this new approach was made salient also beyond the military-strategic issue-area.

Norway immediately and without any revisions adopted the EU sanctions regime, reducing collaboration between Norway and Russia in the North in the business and trade spheres to a tool in a security-oriented conflict. Such collaboration was for many years construed as a main bridgebuilder in Norway–Russia relations.

Probably more important for a Russia that is fixated on security, scores of initiatives have been taken to make Norway into “NATO in the North,” to strengthen the collective defense of all NATO members, and strengthen US military presence in and inter-operability with Europe.<sup>83</sup> Although the MoD already in 2008 penned a white paper on the need of a pivot to the North in NATO, it is only since the crises in Ukraine that this agenda has gained enough traction to result in concrete policy-shifts. In April 2014, Norway, with reference to a “big neighbor with the capacity and will to use force,” agreed to enhance an agreement with Britain from 2012 and increase the number of common exercises, bringing more British soldiers to train in Norway.<sup>84</sup> Since 2017, 330 soldiers from the US Marine Corps have been stationed at Værnes/Trondheim in mid-Norway, on a “rotational basis.” In 2018, the number of US marines in Norway was increased to 700, half of them stationed further north, in Indre Troms.<sup>85</sup>

In recent years more allied forces have been training in Norway and also further north than before: In “Joint Viking” (2017), in “Arctic Challenge” (2017)<sup>86</sup>, and most notably in “Trident Juncture” (2018) described in the introduction to this article. Decisions have been made on building military infrastructure in Norway that can

“house” US defense capabilities such as fighter planes.<sup>87</sup> The MoD has been working on a Norwegian contribution to the European Missile Defense System.<sup>88</sup> Norway has worked to strengthen NATO’s maritime dimension in the North Atlantic and establish the NATO Maritime Command for the Atlantic, which will plan and carry out military operations in the Atlantic.<sup>89</sup> In 2017, the Norwegian MoD established a space program. Satellites in the Arctic were said to be a military as well a civilian asset, an investment in Norwegian security and an “assistance to our allies”<sup>90</sup> In terms of budget spending, funding for surveillance and intelligence has been substantially increased in recent years and the defense budget as such has increased by 30 percent since 2013, from approximately NOK 43 billion to NOK 55 billion by 2018.<sup>91</sup>

While most initiatives are directed at securing Norway and ensuring US defense of Norway, some have resulted in enhanced Norwegian security presence and engagement in the Nordic-Baltic region. In line with the representations of the Baltic states as newly independent, vulnerable small states threatened by a resurgent Russia, Norway has contributed to patrol of the Baltic airspace in 2016 and 2017.<sup>92</sup> Steps have been taken to enhance collaboration between Sweden, Denmark, and Norway in the security sphere through NORDEFCO and NATO, constantly with reference to Russian actions.<sup>93</sup> Norway took part in the large Swedish military exercise Aurora (2017); Swedish soldiers participated in the Trident Juncture (2018), indicating increasing military collaboration between two countries that during the Cold War contributed to the “Nordic balance” where Sweden was neutral and Norway was NATO.

These activities aimed at securing Norway and NATO allies have been accompanied by a significant decline in diplomatic contacts, far beyond immediately cutting the military-to-military contact between Russian and Norway in the North.<sup>94</sup> Norwegian ministers would go to Kiev, London, or various NATO capitals instead, to discuss greater collaboration, often in the military-strategic

81 N110.  
82 N52; N76.  
83 N116.  
84 N26.  
85 N118.  
86 N77.

87 In 2018, Norway said yes to build new platforms for US fighter planes at Rygge, funded through the US European Deterrence Initiative, N117.  
88 N54.  
89 N105; N98.  
90 N98; N115.  
91 N58; N98.  
92 N78.  
93 N61; N76.  
94 Between March 2014 and early 2016 not one Norwegian minister visited Russia, until the Minister of Fisheries went to St. Petersburg in June. N57; N77.

sphere and in the High North.<sup>95</sup> Only on March 29, 2017, did the Norwegian and Russian Foreign Ministers meet face to face in Russia (Arkhangelsk). While first noting that Russia was an “important collaboration partner in the North,” Børge Brende second framed relations in the North with reference to Russian breaches of international law in Ukraine, repeating this representation four times.<sup>96</sup> For the Norwegian Ministry of Defense, the first direct meeting with the Russian counterpart was in February 2018 (since 2013) and only at the level of state officials, not diplomats.<sup>97</sup> Prime Minister Erna Solberg did not travel to Russia until April 2019.<sup>98</sup> Meetings in the Arctic Council and in the Barents Council have continued; however, between 2014 and June 2017, there was a break in meetings of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, which gathers the Nordic and Baltic states as well as Russia, Germany, Poland, and the EU.<sup>99</sup>

In sum, there has been a shift in Norwegian policies toward Russia since 2014, not only in the military-strategic sphere, but also in the economic and diplomatic sphere. Compared to the Cold War “policies of balance,” Norway’s approach has now tilted away from “reassurance” and more toward “deterrence” in the military sphere. Disengagement dominates interaction in other spheres. This shift was made possible through the multifaceted securitization of Russia as a threat, outlined above. This is not to say that the rephrasing of Russia in Norwegian official language *caused* these policy changes—but it served to make them legitimate and logical courses of action.

## Internal Cohesion, External Offence

### Forging a Unified Norway in a Unified West

It is well documented that the repeated official claim that “we are threatened” has been a core vehicle in reformulating identity of self and reuniting the Russian polity since Putin came to power (Wilhelmsen 2014; Morozov 2015; Taylor 2018). This social mechanism is less evident in Norwegian political discourse which is less security-oriented historically and generally. The times are more uncertain now. It has become increasingly imperative to ensure continuity and consistency in understand-

ings of self and to anchor Norway in the broader Western self.

We find in official Norwegian texts on Russia post-Crimea the repeated claim that the new policy initiatives noted above are part of the established “long lines” in Norwegian foreign policy. Norway’s Cold War “policies of balance” are said to be strictly followed. These arguments about a *continuous* Norwegian approach become stronger over time.<sup>100</sup> There is also the constant invoking of “broad political agreement” on these policies, with cross-referencing between the Norwegian Conservative government, the Norwegian Parliament, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg (former Prime Minister and head of the Norwegian Labor Party) and the founding fathers of the Cold War “policies of balance.” The texts forge a sense of continuation and consistency in policies as well as a solid Norwegian we-ness, while covering over the factual changes in policies.<sup>101</sup>

The current times of international turmoil are specifically given as a reason to stick to the long lines of Norwegian foreign policy and continue to cultivate Norway’s “consensus culture.”<sup>102</sup> When criticisms arise outside of the official narrative (often from actors in the north of Norway), holding that the new policies are a break with those long lines, they are publicly dismissed in op-eds by government officials, with reference to the “long lines” and “we all agree...” arguments.<sup>103</sup> Opposing arguments are construed as “attacks,” or discredited as stand-alone “experiments” or dangerous attempts to “sow discord” in a critical situation.<sup>104</sup> Little debate about whether Norway is in breach with its “good past” or whether Russia could be a security-seeker in the North is allowed on the top political level. Instead of inquiry into what it is that Russia actually wants, there is an inward focus, driven by the need to forge Norway’s biographical continuity and internal unity.

Moreover, Norway has long been fused into the wider Western social entity, with unity with the United States projected as the primary means for Norway to achieve a credible defense. This trope stands strong in the texts reviewed, together with a new idea: “Norway’s strong and deep relationship with the USA is more important than ever.”<sup>105</sup> Even with Donald Trump at the helm of power, priority is now given to avoiding criticism and standing

<sup>95</sup> N26; N59.

<sup>96</sup> N69.

<sup>97</sup> N100.

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/g7kME5/Putin-og-Solberg-vil-ha-mer-samarbeid-mellom-Norge-og-Russland>. Accessed October 21, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> N79.

<sup>100</sup> N63; N65; N66; N67; N71; N84; N86; N92; N102; N106; N118; N119.

<sup>101</sup> N53; N56; N69; N84; N86; N92; N118; N119.

<sup>102</sup> N105.

<sup>103</sup> N86; N92; N102; N106; N107.

<sup>104</sup> N52; N55.

<sup>105</sup> N52; N63; N66; N99; N101; N105.

together with the United States.<sup>106</sup> Being “relevant” for US interests is presented as being in line with Norway’s longstanding national agenda and as the core mechanism for ensuring US defense in this crisis-ridden era.<sup>107</sup>

When Western unity becomes existential, it becomes imperative to let the United States shape dispositions of exercises and strategic priorities in the North. That Norway and the United States might or even should have differing narratives of and approaches to Russia is disregarded. For the United States, for example, the deployment of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier and its strike group to the Norwegian Sea in October 2018 was intended to highlight how seriously Washington takes the *Russian threat* in the North (Gorenburg 2018). Official US representations attach a much higher degree of threat to “Russia” and advise a far more assertive approach to Russia than Norway’s initial representations and approach to Russia.<sup>108</sup> At first, Norway stressed that it did not view Russia as a direct threat in the North.<sup>109</sup> But the social costs of breaking Western unity and paying attention to the signals that the new approach sends across the border into Russia proved too high. Similarly, the 2016 NATO concept and policy of “enhanced forward presence” in Europe does not fit well with the Norwegian “policies of balance”—but agreeing and contributing is necessary to ensure *unity* with all NATO allies and is explicitly given as a main priority.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, the need to anchor Norway into a Western self is not limited to the United States or NATO. A similar logic was at play in Norway’s response to the Skripal case in the UK in 2018: With reference to showing “solidarity” with allies and partners, Norway immediately agreed that the event was a “chemical weapons attack” ... “unseen in Europe since the Second World War,” ascribed guilt to the Russian government and expelled one Russian diplomat from Norway.<sup>111</sup> What such policies, aimed at addressing, mobilizing, and uniting the Western audiences, look like from the other side of the new

East–West divide in Europe, or the kinds of reactions they might elicit, seems to be of lesser importance.

### Externalization and Escalation

The Norwegian leadership’s preoccupation with mobilizing the home audience and forging internal cohesion through securitizing Russia has not escaped notice on the other side. Norway could insist on the “defensive” nature of its “policies of continuity” and the superior moral position of the West, but Russia continuously failed to recognize this self-assigned Norwegian identity. The review of Russian texts above shows that the seeds of Russian non-recognition were present in 2014, growing exponentially with the escalation in Norway’s securitizing narrative. Russia’s image of Norway/NATO as a security-seeker had all but vanished by 2018. Thus, while the West presents “Trident Juncture” as defensive and having the overarching aim of demonstrating “the credibility of its [NATO’s] military deterrent and the unity of its membership,”<sup>112</sup> the Russian side declares: “Even if NATO says otherwise, “Trident Juncture” is really preparation for a large-scale armed conflict in regions bordering with the Russian Federation.”<sup>113</sup> And while the emergence of a US air carrier in the Norwegian Sea in connection with the exercise was celebrated by NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, with a Tweet: “Our forces at sea & this impressive carrier keep us safe and show how North America and Europe stand together,”<sup>114</sup> the Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman warned that Russia saw this as yet another example of “US saber rattling,”<sup>115</sup>

But such cries from the other side of the border are irrelevant to a Norwegian leadership preoccupied with internal mobilization. They do not contemplate what their words and actions might look like from the other side—particularly when what “we” do has no effect on a Russia that is construed as necessarily assertive and whose warnings are mere “propaganda.” Reviewing the Norwegian

<sup>106</sup> N53; N103; N52; N72; N98; N105; N109; N112.

<sup>107</sup> N64; N109.

<sup>108</sup> For a short overview of recent official US threat representations of Russia see Lieven (2018, 117). See also US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis on new US National Defense Strategy, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-military-china-russia/u-s-military-puts-great-power-competition-at-heart-of-strategy-mattis-idUSKBN1F81TR>. Accessed October 25, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> N51.

<sup>110</sup> N105; N63.

<sup>111</sup> N113; N111.

<sup>112</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg 2018. <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/natos-trident-juncture-exercise-deterrence-signal-russia>. Accessed October 25, 2019.

<sup>113</sup> General Zaparenko, cited in <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/441627-arctic-nato-trident-russia/>. Accessed October 25, 2019. See also Prime minister Lavrov’s framing of Trident Juncture R72.

<sup>114</sup> Jens Stoltenberg, ✓ @jensstoltenberg .@USSHARRYSTRUMAN is en route to Norway & #NATO exercise #TridentJuncture. <https://www.rt.com/news/441829-us-aircraft-carrier-arctic/>. Accessed October 25, 2019.

<sup>115</sup> N92; N84.

discourse on Russia, I found that these understandings of Russia are firmly and constantly communicated. Norway denies Russia the right to react. When new steps are taken in building Norwegian “defense,” the Norwegian authorities, time and again, see “no reasons for any Russian reactions,” and “find it hard to believe” that such steps “are understood as a threat in Russia.”<sup>116</sup>

And here we come to the crucial effect of multifaceted securitization for enteric use: Norway’s rejection of Russia—of not only its self-identification as a security-seeker in the North, but also its self-identification as a legitimate player across issue-areas, in relation to Norway in particular and in international politics in general. Russia construes itself as a defensive and more generally as a normal, law-abiding, and cooperative actor, *but is not recognized as being any of this* in Norwegian official discourse four years after the annexation of Crimea. This non-recognition extends to almost any Russian action or actor throughout the spectrum of issue-areas, and even leaves little room for a return of recognition in the future. Such exogenously generated dissonance has a visible effect on the Russian leadership. Russia does not respond by retreating and pledging to embark on the road to progressive change. Instead, it moves into *avoidance*, revalidating its own identity by questioning Norway’s securitizing narrative ... and eventually mirroring and escalating its own multifaceted securitization of Norway and the West.

Picking up on an interview on a Norwegian TV channel with Foreign Minister Frank Bakke-Jensen, who stated that Norway was boosting its military capabilities “because of its threatening neighbor,” the Russian Foreign Minister asked “where does this drama come from? The same Bakke-Jensen has repeatedly stated that Norway does not see for itself a direct military threat from our country. Other Norwegian officials expressed the same spirit at the highest level. Has this assessment of Oslo really changed, and now the Norwegian neighbors see us as a threat?”<sup>117</sup>

Disbelief and sarcasm increasingly accompanied Russian official comments, when NATO’s Center for Strategic Communications listed the program *Russian Club* as an instrument for “Russian political and strategic communication” or when Russia was accused of waging an “information campaign” against the USA and meddling in the US 2016 presidential elections.<sup>118</sup> The allegations by Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) that “Kremlin hackers” had attacked Norwegian agencies, including

the MFA as well as universities and political parties, and later that Russia was jamming civilian GPS navigation in the North, were all met with a similar strategy of rhetorical externalization.<sup>119</sup> The accusations that Russia was trying to split and undermine Europe, meddle in European elections, provoke Brexit, etc., are represented as utterly unfounded and biased.<sup>120</sup> They spring from the “Russophobic sentiments of parts of the Western elites” and the “hysterical” “anti-Russian” mood in the United States, in the UK and elsewhere in the West.<sup>121</sup> Russia says Norway/Europe has lost the ability to judge fairly: it passes judgments on Russia without evidence, without listening to Russia, without making official requests or setting up expert meetings to address the issue at hand. In spring 2019, the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman asked pointedly: “Why transfer practical cooperation to the sphere of megaphone diplomacy and endless baseless accusations, while not providing facts to the public or through bilateral channels. If there are facts, let’s start a serious dialogue.”<sup>122</sup>

One might say this is just sophisticated Russian propaganda—and in part that may be so. But these statements speak loudly of the social, interactive nature of relations between states. Russia has an *experience* of not being recognized. It self-identifies as a security-seeker in the North, and has officially stated that it expects other states to relate to it with “mutual respect,” “respect for the interests of others,” “taking the interests of others into account,” “equal rights,” and “balance of interests.”<sup>123</sup> Norway, and the West, have not related to Russia this way. In response to the constantly widening gap between Russia’s self-identification and the identification of Russia in Norway’s securitizing narrative, Russia has been tuning up the mirroring of accusations: Western claims of Russian acts as “propaganda,” “fake news,” “threat to national security,” “meddling in elections,” etc., are said to be merely pretexts to discredit and harm Russia and are practices of the West, not Russia.<sup>124</sup>

By 2019, the Russian blame game had become fully black and white, with Russia taking the moral high ground and Norway being accused of being an “irresponsible actor” in the North.<sup>125</sup> In turn, such talk sends strong signals of non-recognition of Norway’s self-ascribed security-seeker identity, even blocking out positive recognition of Norway in issue-areas beyond the

<sup>116</sup> R64.

<sup>117</sup> R22; R25; R26; R31; R34; R42.

<sup>118</sup> R20.

<sup>119</sup> R31.

<sup>120</sup> R39; R41; R52; R65; R67.

<sup>121</sup> R69.

<sup>122</sup> R26.

<sup>123</sup> R32; R37; R41; R42; R43; R46; R52; R58; R65; R67; RB71.

<sup>124</sup> R69.

<sup>125</sup> N60; N115.

security sphere. This only confirms the identity ascribed to Russia in Norway and paves the way for disengagement in issue-areas where the two parties could cooperate. It pushes the spiral of tension yet another notch up, toward the point where each side sees only the face of the enemy, where guns are the most reasonable way of relating, and the outbreak of war seems imminent.

## Conclusions

Ever since the Ukraine crises, Russia and Norway have been talking each other up as multifaceted threats as regards nearly all aspects of relations. This has legitimized policy changes far beyond the security sphere on both sides, which in turn are taken to confirm these new and incompatible identifications of the other side. It has created a disconnect in communication and recognition between Norway and Russia that seems to be driving tension upward to a point where the outbreak of hostilities seems imminent. With the societal and political fracture since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian leadership's heavy securitization of external threats to the Russian self has been a prime social mechanism for creating a "sense of continuity and order in events" (Giddens 1991, 243). For the Norwegian leadership post-2014—faced with what has appeared to be a far more dangerous and unpredictable future—it has become imperative to pay attention to internal audiences, revalidate self-identity and forge unity, within Norway as well as in the wider West. And just as Russia fails to take into account what its rejection of the West may look like on the other side, Norway pays no attention to the audience on the other side of the border in the North. The result? The verbal and practical dismissal of Russia as a legitimate actor across issue-areas in the North triggers and encourages precisely the "assertive" and "aggressive" Russia that Norway has come to fear. The Norwegian–Russian case illustrates vividly how a pair of collective actors that experience acute ontological dissonance through their own mutual and multifaceted securitization, and that seek to resolve this dissonance through avoidance and externalization, can be caught up in a spiral that can lead to confrontation.

That said, for every *other* there usually are several identifications. "Russia" has a range of deep-rooted identifications in Norwegian political discourse; and in official texts 2014–2018, we can also see a more reasonable and law-abiding Russian neighbor gradually re-emerging, albeit in a small way.<sup>126</sup> There is an acknowledgment that the North is of strategic importance for

Russia, and even that Norway needs to "respect Russia's legitimate security interests in the Arctic."<sup>127</sup> The idea of collaboration on common interests is gradually returning in MoD, MFA as well as Prime Minister texts.<sup>128</sup> Foreign Ministry texts voice the need to uphold cooperation in the spheres of fisheries, nuclear safety, the environment and natural resource management, search-and-rescue in the Barents Sea, people-to-people collaboration, and in forums such as the Barents Council and Secretariat, and the Arctic Council.<sup>129</sup> While this may look like a reluctant de-securitization from the side of the Norwegian government—these more positive identifications usually appear when pressured by domestic dissident audiences in Norway—this also sheds light on how de-escalation may be achieved.

First, in a democratic country such as Norway the audience does play a role. It can wage resistance by rejecting a securitizing narrative and giving voice to alternative identifications of Russia, at least in certain issue-areas, disfiguring the image of Russia as a *multifaceted* threat and helping to make possible positive interaction with and recognition of Russia in certain issue-areas. As noted by Wilhelmsen (2017) and Lupovici (2012, 815–16), securitizing actors are constrained by existing discursive structures, the specific discursive terrain in which they and their target audience are embedded. While the Russian system has fewer such correctives, criticisms of the stark securitization of the West are sometimes heard from voices within the Russian elite.

Second, political leaders can observe, learn, and make deliberate choices about what identifications to highlight when they speak of other states. Whereas the classical interpretation of the security dilemma obscures the role of choice by foregrounding structure, a discursive interpretation foregrounds human practice. Political leaders operate in complex, restraining discursive terrains, but can decide what identifications of self and other to accentuate. Norway's choices are not driven solely by "systemic pressures," although this trope is constantly invoked. The return of "prudent restraint"—the realization that Norway does not *need* to embrace a total Cold-War-era rejection of Russia—is not beyond reach.

Third, and to the case at hand, interaction has a dynamic of its own—in a very practical sense. Not only do Norway and Russia still have several alternative, less-malign identifications of each other to invoke, but these identifications have also been implemented in long-standing practical collaboration in the North. This

<sup>127</sup> N69; N88; N93.

<sup>128</sup> N62; N68; N82; N83; N95.

<sup>129</sup> N88; N89; N94; N80.

<sup>126</sup> N63; N82.

heritage of practical collaboration constantly becomes relevant through unexpected happenings. Such events, with direct contact between Russian and Norwegian officials, seem to elicit less-adverse official characterizations of the other. Moreover, they complicate the image of the other for the political leaders themselves. The direct telephone communication between Prime Ministers Solberg and Medvedev following a helicopter accident at Svalbard in October 2017, with several Russian fatalities, elicited Norwegian official representations of Russia as a responsible and trustworthy actor.<sup>130</sup> From the Russian side came the acknowledgment: “We are grateful to the Norwegian side for the exceptionally high level of interaction with the Russian participants in the search operation.”<sup>131</sup>

While these small signs of positive recognition and interaction arguably can contribute to chipping away at the new ice front that five years of mutual and multifaceted securitization has created in the North, the current tension will most likely persist. Both for Russia and Norway/the West the securitization of the other works as a social glue in these times of global uncertainty.

## Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *Journal of Global Security Studies* data archive.

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<sup>130</sup> R42.

<sup>131</sup> R42.

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